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Part One

The Era of the *Amīr al-Mu'minīn*, 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz

From Birth to Caliphate -

His Name, Title, Epithet and Family:

His name was 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz bin Marwān bin al-Ḥakm bin Abī 'al-'Āṣ bin Umayyah bin 'Abd Shams bin 'Abd Manāf, the eminent *Imām* (leader), *Mujtahid* (issuer of independent legal rulings), *Hafīz* (one who has committed the entire Qur'ān to memory) ascetic and slave, the true *Amīr al-Mu'mimīn* (Commander of the Faithful), Abū Hafs, the Qurayshi Umayyad, al-Madani (from al-Madīnah) and later al-Maṣri (from Egypt), the rightly guided, pious Caliph and "Ashajj" (the Mark; Scar) of the Umayyad tribe.⁽¹⁾

He was one of the *Imāms* of *Ijtihad* (the process of independent law-making based on the Islāmic *Sharī'ah*

(1) *Siyar A'lām an-Nubalā'* [The Lives of Noble Figures] (5/144).

and other legal sources)⁽¹⁾ and one of the Rightly Guided *Caliphs*. He was a person of outstanding morals and ethics, well-rounded, refined, diplomatic and politically-minded who showed a keen interest and passion for justice whenever possible. He possessed extensive knowledge as an acclaimed *Faqīh* (jurist) of unadulterated intelligence and understanding. He was devoutly repentant, consciously God-fearing and upright in his obedience to Allāh. Despite holding the seat of the Caliphate, he remained an ascetic who pronounced the truth with firm conviction to those around him, including the many governors who detested his inquisitions of them, or his deducting their salaries, or repossession of their illegitimate acquisitions. He relentlessly discouraged and punished laxity of morals. In fact, they did not cease to hate him up until the moment he was poisoned, upon which he gained conviction and happiness, not counting his high ranking as one of the Rightly Guided *Caliphs* in the view of the people of knowledge.⁽²⁾ As for his speech (may Allāh have mercy on him) it was nothing other than eloquent and articulate.⁽³⁾

His Father:

His name was 'Abd al-'Azīz bin Marwān bin al-Ḥakm, a name that acquired a status as one of the finest Umayyad leaders. Courageous and generous, he held the position of Governor of Egypt for more than twenty years. His qualities

(1) *Ibid* (5/114).

(2) *Ibid* (5/120).

(3) *Ibid* (5/136).

of piety and righteousness were so resolved that when he wanted to marry, he said to his assistant: "Collect four-hundred *Dinar* (coins; units of account) of my good money for I want to marry from a household that possesses goodness." He would later marry Umm 'Āṣim, the daughter of 'Āṣim bin 'Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb (may Allāh be pleased with him), i.e. the granddaughter of the *Amīr al-Mu'minīn*, 'Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb, whose name it is said was Layla.⁽¹⁾ It is noteworthy to mention here that his marrying into the family of 'Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb would not have been so, were it not for his upstanding reputation and virtuous character.

Even as a youth, he possessed a remarkably good character as regards his dedication to pursue knowledge and his obvious interest in the Prophetic *Aḥadīth* (sayings). In favour of his own merit, he once sat in the company of Abū Hurayrah and others among the *Ṣaḥābah* (Companions), his study of the *Aḥadīth* continued to excel even after his appointment as Governor of Egypt. Thereupon, he would habitually appeal to *ash-Shām* (the Levant) to send him what they had been informed pertaining to the sayings of the Messenger of Allāh (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) apart from what had been narrated by Abū Hurayrah, since he was already familiar with those.⁽²⁾ Nevertheless, 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz's father was the type of person who was accustomed to addressing important

(1) 'Abd al-'Azīz bin Marwān: *Sirāthu wa Athruhu fī Aḥdāth al-'Aṣr al-Umawī* ['Abd al-'Azīz bin Marwan: His Biography and Legacy from the Events of the Umayyad Era], p. 58.

(2) *Siyar A'lām an-Nubalā'* [The Lives of Noble Figures] (474/).

matters, both before and after he became the Governor of Egypt. From the time he entered Egypt, he longed to rule over it and for that reason, he exerted great effort from then onwards to one day meet his aspirations, which he did;⁽¹⁾ in actuality, not only did he assume this position but became one of the finest and most generous Umayyad Governors.⁽²⁾ Every day, a thousand dishes would be prepared and placed around his house, in addition to a further one hundred dishes brought round by the tribes. On the subject of his generosity, he used to say: "If a man allows me to give him something knowing that it is from me, then whatever I have of his is greater than what he has of mine."⁽³⁾

Many a historian has commended his distinct munificence, a quality that was coupled with certainty of faith in the fact that Allāh, the Sublime, bestows sustenance on whosoever He wills. Concerning this he would say: "How strange it is that a *Mu'min* (believer) believes that Allāh provides sustenance to whosoever He wills yet he keeps his money locked away at the expense of great reward and commendation!" In the same manner, 'Abd al-'Azīz was a God-fearing man, which is evident from the last words he uttered while on his deathbed: "I wish I were of no importance. If only I were this free-flowing water or plant in the land of the *Hijāz*!"⁽⁴⁾

(1) *Al-Wilāy wa Kitāb al-Qaḍāh* [Governors and Judges] by al-Kundī, p. 54.

(2) *Mu'jiz al-'Islām* [The Miracle of Islām] by Khālid Muḥammad Khālid, p. 55.

(3) *Abd al-'Azīz bin Marwān*, p. 55.

(4) *Ibid*, p.56; an extract from *al-Bidāyah wa an-Nihāyah* [The Beginning and End] by Ibn Kathīr.

102:1) and began to cry. He then said: "Until you visit the graves" (*ibid*: 2), while the graves are but a visiting place and one must return to either *al-Jannah* (Paradise) or to *an-Nār* (Hellfire)."⁽¹⁾ Some of the positions that illustrate the type of influence the Holy Qur'ān had on 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz's personality include:

i. Social Environment:

One's surrounding social environment plays a decisive role in shaping men and building their characters and in this respect 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz lived in an era wherein *Taqwā* (God-consciousness), *Salah* (goodness), a thirst for acquiring knowledge and applying the Book (i.e. the Qur'ān) and the *Sunnah* (Prophetic Example) prevailed. A number of the *Ṣaḥābah* (Companions of the Prophet, (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) were still in al-Madīnah, which allowed him to narrate *aḥādīth* (Prophetic sayings) from the likes of 'Abdullah bin Ja'far bin Abī Ṭālib, as-Sā'ib bin Yazīd and Suhīl bin Sa'ad who gave him a cup which the Prophet (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) had drunk from. As for Anas bin Mālik, he said: "I never saw anyone imitate the prayer of the Messenger (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) like this young man", in reference to 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz.⁽²⁾ In this manner, residing in al-Madīnah as part of that society had an

(1) *Ar-Riqqah wa al-Bakā'* [Sensitivity and Crying] by Ibn Abi Dunya, no. 425.

(2) *Siyar A'lām an-Nubalā'* [The Lives of Noble Figures] (5/114).

enormous impact on his temperament, his sense of faith and his spiritual adherence in making the eminent and intellectual person 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz became.⁽¹⁾

His Learning at the Hands of al-Madīnah's Senior Fuqahā' (Jurists) and Scholars:

'Umar's father, 'Abd al-'Aziz, entrusted him to the care of Ṣāliḥ bin Kīsān who was one of the most learned and pious men of al-Madīnah. 'Umar received his education under the supervision of Ṣāliḥ, who was very particular about his role in disciplining 'Umar. For instance, he made it incumbent upon 'Umar to pray every prayer with the congregation in the *masjid* (mosque), but when 'Umar turned up late one day, the congregation informed Ṣāliḥ who questioned him about it, asking: "What business were you engaged in?" 'Umar replied: "I was sorting out my hair", to which Ṣāliḥ remarked: "You love yourself that much that you would let it influence your prayers?!" He immediately wrote to 'Abd al-'Azīz informing him about it, at which instant his father sent a delegate to 'Umar who was instructed to not speak a word before shaving his son's head completely.⁽²⁾ From then on, 'Umar desired to imitate the manner in which the Prophet (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) prayed: ardently and meticulously. In keeping with that, he would prolong his bowing and prostrating and lighten his standing and sitting,

(1) *Al-Jawānib at-Tarbawīyah fī Hayāt 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz* [The Educational Aspects in the Life of 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz], p. 23.

(2) *Al-Bidāyah wa an-Nihāyah* [The Beginning and the End] (12/678).

death was seven hundred *Dīnār*, which covered the cost of his shroud, which was five *Dīnār* and the plot of land for his grave which was two *Dīnār*, after which the remainder was split between his sons, meaning that they each received a share of nineteen *dirham*. On the other hand, Hishām bin 'Abd al-Mālik died also leaving behind eleven sons and to each of them he bequeathed a million *Dīnār*. Nevertheless, it was but a few years on that I saw one of 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz's sons donate one hundred horses for the sake of Allāh in one day, whilst people were said to have witnessed one of Hishām bin 'Abd al-Mālik's sons receive charity."⁽¹⁾ The above narrations clearly show us that even though 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz received a large inheritance from his father, it diminished to nothing by the time of his death (may Allāh have mercy in him and be pleased with him).⁽²⁾

(1) *Sīrat 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz* [The Life of 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz] by Ibn al-Jawzi, p. 338; *Fiqh 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz* [The Jurisprudence of 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz] (124/).

(2) *Fiqh 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz* [The Jurisprudence of 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz] (156/).

The People's Commemoration of Him after His Death:

Maslamah bin 'Abd al-Mālik's Eulogy:

When 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz died, Maslamah looked at him while he was lying in his burial shroud and said: "May Allāh have mercy on you! You have softened our hard hearts and kept us mindful of being righteous."⁽¹⁾

Fāṭimah bint 'Abd al-Mālik's Eulogy:

Wabīb bin al-Warad is reported to have said: "We were told that when 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz died, some jurists went to his wife to pay their condolences to her, saying: "We have come to offer condolences to you over 'Umar. Your affliction is one shared by the *Ummah*, so could you tell us something about him (may Allāh have mercy on him)? What was he like when he was at home, as a man's family know him best?" She replied: "By Allāh, he did not pray or fast more than anyone else but, by Allāh, I never saw anyone more fearful of Allāh than 'Umar. Sometimes he used to lie in my bed where one should enjoy his pleasure with his wife but instead he

(1) *Sīrat 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz* [The Life of 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz] by Ibn al-Jawzi, p. 329.